

Tales of Afghanistan, Moscow Style

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Following is an article by Ambassador Marshall D. Shulman, Special Adviser to the Secretary of State, written for WorldPaper in February 1980.

The Soviet invasion and occupation of Afghanistan have significantly altered the international landscape for the foreseeable future.

For the United States, it is a matter of regret that U.S.-Soviet relations have suffered as a consequence of Moscow's ill-advised course.

Globally, as the broader implications of the Soviet resort to force against its nonaligned neighbor became apparent, it is the stability of the international system itself that has suffered. Every country is less secure when one country loses its sovereignty and independence to Soviet aggression.

It may never be possible to reconstruct satisfactorily all the calculations that went into Moscow's decision. Clearly there was gross miscalculation at some stage—or perhaps throughout the entire period of several months in which Moscow prepared its intervention. What is somewhat surprising to the student of Soviet foreign policy is its failure to have available any plausible justification for the extreme action of armed invasion. The Soviet version of events comes apart at the seams whenever it is subjected to scrutiny. This leaves the student and the policymaker unable to do more than conjecture what really led to the December 27 coup against President Hafizullah Amin and what it portends for future Soviet intentions.

It may be illuminating to examine

some of the inconsistencies of Moscow's explanations measured against what is known about the events in Kabul. The gist of Soviet official statements to the United States and many other governments was that their military forces were invited by the Afghan Government to assist in a struggle against outside forces. This flies in the face of overwhelming evidence that the primary purpose of the Soviet invasion was to suppress a popular uprising against the repressive government.

Advisers-Betrayers

It would be easier to give credence to the Soviet version if events had proceeded smoothly on the night of the takeover. However, Afghan troops loyal to President Amin put up a fierce struggle against the Soviets who attacked him at Durulaman Palace and caused his death. Hundreds of casualties on both sides bore witness to Afghan resistance to a Soviet-installed regime. The resistance might have been even greater had it not been for Soviet deception. Afghan military forces were partially neutralized by Soviet military advisers purporting to be aiding Afghanistan—an object lesson for other countries where Soviet military advisers are present.

A further anomaly in the series of events surrounding the coup was the unexplained death of Viktor Paputin, Soviet First Deputy Minister of Internal Affairs. Paputin's presence in Kabul was noted in early December, although no official announcement was made about his mission. The next public mention of Paputin was

an obituary in Pravda in early January. The obituary was less prominent than would be expected for an official of Paputin's rank, and no details of his death were disclosed—only the date: December 28, 1979, the day after the Afghan coup.

If the Soviet claim that they were invited to invade seems flimsy, so does the argument that Afghanistan was threatened by outside forces. Only weeks after the invasion and following votes in the United Nations to censure Moscow (13-2 in the Security Council, 104-18 in the General Assembly), did Soviet propaganda elaborate on this hollow allegation. In a major Pravda article on January 19, Aleksei Petrov wrote of "tens of thousands" of mercenaries supposedly involved in Afghan fighting before the Soviet invasion. Yet the former Afghan Government never filed any complaint with the United Nations, and all evidence indicates that resistance to the Communists led by Amin was essentially an indigenous, self-sustaining movement by Islamic nationalists.

Petrov also claimed to name two vessels allegedly delivering arms to Afghan rebels based in Pakistan. His allegations

distort the true state of affairs: Most of the weapons used by proponents of the "revolutionary" regime that took power in 1978 were of Soviet manufacture, captured from the Afghan Army, and, in the later stages, obtained through wholesale defection of Afghan military units.

No Soviet tale of intrigue is complete without the U.S. Central Intelligence Agency (CIA). Petrov recklessly applied a CIA label to well-known American anthropologist Louis Dupree, who lives in Pakistan and whose hundreds of friends in the region know this charge is false.

Twisted Story

An even more astonishing allegation of CIA connections was broadcast over Moscow television in late January by Leonid Zamyatin, a leading propagandist of the Soviet Communist Party Central Committee staff. Zamyatin asserted that President Amin had been a CIA agent who intended to betray the revolution. He failed to explain why a CIA agent would have sought to impose a Marxist regime upon his country, as Amin did. Zamyatin also failed to explain why a CIA agent would call for a massive

Soviet military intervention, which is what Soviet propaganda says Amin did just before his death. One can only note that it was President Brezhnev, not President Carter, who congratulated Amin on his "election" as President of Afghanistan in September 1979.

The attempts to discredit Amin and the contrived Soviet charges of outside forces threatening Afghanistan suggest a hypothesis about the real reasons for the invasion. The Soviet Union saw a gradual deterioration in the domestic position of the Marxist regime that deposed President Daoud in April 1978 and lost patience with Amin's group who refused to take Soviet advice about governing the country. Unwilling to let events take their own course, the Soviets installed a puppet through armed intervention. The great danger is that this will succeed and whet Soviet appetites for similar aggression elsewhere. ■

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